

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

IDLER AND POET. By ROSSITER JOHNSON. 16mo. pp. 120. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co. 1883.

This collection of verses would seem to deprecate by its title too careful consideration. We will endeavor to humor the author, and concede that it should be read as it was written, in hours of idleness, which means for the literary man not always absolute repose. He frequently assumes himself in fields and with work, not in his own strict time, nor in his usual vein. A fertile mind bears all sorts of fruits; it opens to a fertile mind bears all sorts of fruit.

It is in displaying all, often thereby discrediting the better, sometimes obtaining applause, for its very poorest work from an indiscriminating public. In these days, as often in the past, our literary men are remarkable for versatility; they write prose and verse indefinitely; they empty their portfolio periodically. The essayist is wanted for poetry, the poet for an essay; or both find it easy, having once passed the difficult gates of the editors of magazines and of the publishers, to print all kinds of miscellaneous writing; just as in the leisure days, when men distinguished for any kind of talent were paraded upon the lecture platform, where the performance frequently turned out to be an exhibition of the man rather than an intellectual conference.

The right mood, the right word, are not at the command of the poet's will. Nor is it always possible or safe to complete in an unispired hour the inventions descending upon his imagination in hours of insight. Therefore the short occasional poem is so common; it is often quite perfect, though from the pen of no great reputation. It is a safer form to attempt than any other. Long, deliberate works require many favorable conditions.

Every feeling may be expressed by the poet now in rapid, transient form; the present moment is triumphant; and he will be heard, if he marches abreast the procession of events and lives in the life around him. For literature must be in harmony with the prominent characteristics of modern life, an intense but momentary concentration of itself on present events and interests. The poet contributes his commentary, and wishes more than most other recorders to collect and preserve his scattered leaves.

In such a volume as Mr. Johnson has presented us with, the important point for himself and the public was a proper selection. Here are specimens of various forms of verification, in tones from grave to gay. The topics range up and down human life. We enter the "Gate of Tears," a room that has vigorous passages, and pass on through the path of love, grief, common incidents and descriptions, and hear at the end the voice of laughter in such poems as are included in "Weather Lyrics."

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